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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: GROWING TURKISH REACTION, PUBLIC CRITICISM OF U.S.
DETENTION OF TURKISH SOLDIERS IN NORTHERN IRAQ

SUMMARY

1. Negative reaction by the Turkish Government, opposition politicians, and the press to the reported detention of 11 Turkish Special Forces troops in Northern Iraq continues to grow. Prime Minister Erdogan, describing the incident as "extremely distressing," said that he expects the situation to be resolved "by this evening." Foreign Minister Gul called the action "unacceptable," and a Foreign Ministry statement noted that it could "have impacts on our relations with the United States." Several opposition leaders have spoken out against the U.S. operation and called for the immediate release of the Turkish detainees. True Path Party (DYP) leader Mehmet Agar called on the Foreign Minister to cancel his upcoming trip to the United States. End Summary.

GOT EXPRESSES ANGER AT U.S. ACTION

2. PM Erdogan reacted strongly to reports that U.S. forces had detained Turkish special forces team members operating in Northern Iraq. Speaking to journalists this morning, Erdogan characterized the incident as "extremely distressing" and "unacceptable." Erdogan asserted that "this attitude by an allied country against its ally cannot be explained." Later in the day, the PM noted that he "hopes the situation will be resolved by this evening." In a written statement released this afternoon, the Foreign Ministry expressed "profound sorrow" at the incident." The statement noted Turkish efforts to resolve the situation through FM's Gul's phone call to Secretary Powell and TGS Chief General Ozkok's call to SACEUR General Jones. The Ministry called on all Turkish soldiers to be released immediately, and for the United States to investigate and take "necessary action" against U.S. personnel responsible for the action. The statement concluded by predicting that the incident could have "negative impacts" on Turkey's relations with the United States.

OPPOSITION LEADER CALLS ON GUL TO CANCEL U.S. TRIP

3. Mehmet Agar, leader of the opposition True Path Party (DYP), claimed that this is "the first time that the military in one NATO country took prisoners from another NATO country's military." Urging the GOT to protest the action "immediately and vehemently," Agar said that "under these circumstances" FM Gul should "rethink" his planned visit to Washington and, if necessary, "cancel it." Agar said that Turkey must "never accept this kind of treatment." He blamed the GOT for its "mistakes," and hypothesized that "we wouldn't be faced with such a problem if we had sent our troops into Northern Iraq last December." Agar predicted that "even worse developments" could be expected. Muhsin Yazicioglu, leader of the National Unity Party (BBP) (not represented in parliament), described the U.S. action as "insolent," and called for the Turkish detainees to be freed immediately. Yazicioglu said the U.S. approach was "very dangerous," and accused the United States of acting as a "jandarma trying to intimidate other independent states."

COMMENTATORS: U.S. TRYING TO REMOVE TURKS FROM IRAQ

14. Press commentary on the alleged incident has also been sharply negative. The influential all-news cable channel NTV asserted that the "real reason" behind the incident is the growing U.S. discomfort with the presence of Turkish special forces in Iraq. The commentary claims that PUK leader Talabani has been pressuring the United States for some time to "remove Turkish soldiers from the region." The report further claimed that U.S. forces had asked Turkish special forces to close down its liaison bureaus in Suleymaniye, Erbil, and Dohuk, and had requested special teams to "withdraw" from the area. NTV concluded its commentary by saying that Ankara finds it "unacceptable that Turkish soldiers working in consultation with the U.S. military and Kurdish officials in the region were targeted instead of the thousands of armed terrorists whose weapons are directed against Turkey."

SPONTANEOUS PROTEST OUTSIDE EMBASSY GATE

15. The reported incident also sparked a spontaneous demonstration outside the embassy gates this afternoon. A small group of demonstrators gathered to chant anti-American slogans before dispersing about 20 minutes later. Well-known leftist troublemaker Dogu Perincek showed up to play to the cameras and slam the U.S. This marks the first such demonstration since the early days of the war in Iraq. ConGen Istanbul informed the embassy that a similar demonstration led by a labor group was held this afternoon near the Consulate.